



# ANXIETY AND ADJUSTMENT IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF GLOBAL STUDENT EXPERIENCES

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## ABSTRACT

Anxiety is a common mental issue among students affecting their academic, social, and emotional well beings. This systematic review integrates empirical findings on the correlation between anxiety and adjustment in student population, discussing the influence of anxiety on adjustment in educational, emotional and social aspects and their mediating factors. Following the PRISMA guidelines, the review examined 34 studies obtained from a range of academic databases, namely Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, Scopus, PubMed, PsycINFO, and JSTOR. Inclusion criteria focused on quantitative studies that assessed the effects of anxiety on adjustment in students at different educational levels. Findings consistently suggested a negative association between adjustment and anxiety, whereby higher anxiety is correlated with poor adjustment. Mediators such as self-esteem, cognitive emotion regulation, social support, and personality characteristics, describe the manner in which anxiety influences individuals' social and academic adaptation capability while moderators within the relationship between anxiety and adjustment such as gender, socioeconomic status, physical activity and culture influence the nature and extent of the association between anxiety and individuals' adjustment process. It is recommended that schools and institutions should implement focused interventions, such as cognitive behavioural strategies, emotional regulation training, and gender-sensitive support, in order to counteract the impact of anxiety on students' adjustment across academic, emotional and social domains. Future studies should emphasize long-term trends, cross-cultural and individual differences to further comprehend the interrelationship of anxiety and adjustment.

**KEYWORDS:** Anxiety, Adjustment, Adaptation, Students, Adolescents

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Academic environments are crucible for students, preparing them not only intellectually, but also mentally. Student life is marked by numerous changes, challenges, and pressures that can affect students' mental health. One of the emotional responses to these challenges, students experience is anxiety. Anxiety interferes with the student's capacity to cope with social, mental and academic issues they are facing. Adjustment helps students to overcome such challenges in a balanced way and enable them academically, emotionally and socially to succeed in life.

Anxiety is a mental state of worry, fear and apprehension, and characterised by physical symptoms such as rapid heartbeat, sweating, or shaking. It arises due to feelings of threat or uncertainty. When anxiety becomes excessive or long-lasting, it may reduce daily functioning (APA, 2022). Academic anxiety is a type of anxiety of academic-related environments, such as test anxiety and specific subject anxiety, which may greatly affect cognitive and emotional states (Das, et al. 2014). Academic anxiety is the fear, uneasiness or nervousness that students feel when faced with an educational task such as preparing for an exam, doing his homework, specific subjects like maths, reading or science, parents' expectations, peers or group work in the classroom, (BSU AARC 2022). Test or examination anxiety is a form of academic anxiety that involves worry and dread which may negatively affect academic performance (APA 2023). Social anxiety or anxiety experienced in social settings

affects inter-personal relationships, performance, emotional well-being and functioning, as well as prospects of career development (Laldinpui et. al. 2024).

Good (1959) defined adjustment as "the process of finding and adopting behaviours suitable to the environment or changes in the environment" (Mangal, 2002, p. 490). The concept of adjustment is commonly understood as the process through which individuals alter their behaviour to achieve greater harmony with environmental demands. It enables individuals to adapt their lifestyle to meet situational demands while also enabling them to change situations when necessary. Adjustment involves the change of behaviour, thought, and feeling in order to adapt to environmental changes. In this context, adjustment refers to student's ability to adapt to new environments., academic demands and social relationships.

Adjustment has three main domains: educational, emotional and social. Educational adjustment refers to how students adapt to their school environment, including both mental and academic factors (Redd et al., 2001); emotional adjustment is described as an individual's ability to successfully interact and maintain harmonious relationships with others (Kirtania et al., 2021) and social adjustment is the ability to maintain cordial relationships with members of the society (Cambridge dictionary).

Anxiety affects student's academic performance and mental wellbeing. A small amount of anxiety can actually have

positive effects on students' motivation and participation in educational activities (Attri, 2013). Excessive anxiety usually causes difficulties in adapting to new academic and social environments, which exacerbates difficulty in concentrating, academic problems, and reduces social involvement (Parvez & Shakir, 2014). Additionally, poor adaptation to new environments increases anxiety further, creating a continuous cycle, which affects the well-being of students.

The paper aims to investigate the relationship between anxiety and overall adjustment, as well as the connections between anxiety and the three domains of adjustment. Also, the paper explores the moderating and mediating factors that influence these relationships.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1. Design

Following the methodological guidelines provided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA), the current systematic review was performed to provide transparency and rigor in the review process (Moher et al., 2009; PRISMA, n.d.).

### 2.2. Search Methods

The search was performed using specified set of keywords: ("Anxiety") AND ("Adjustment OR "Adaptation") AND ("Students" OR "School Children" OR "Adolescents") across multiple databases such as Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, Scopus, PubMed, PsycINFO, and JSTOR.

#### Inclusion criteria were as follows:

- i. Empirically examined the relationship between anxiety and adjustment.
- ii. Specifically aimed only at student populations 12–25 years, primary to university level.
- iii. Explored at least one of the adjustment domains that included educational, emotional, or social dimensions.
- iv. Published in English, between 2012 and 2025.

#### Exclusion criteria were as follows:

- i. Enrolled non-student samples (e.g., patients, professionals, adult populations).
- ii. Did not measure at least one area of adjustment (social, educational, or emotional).
- iii. Were theoretical papers, review articles, or commentaries that lack original empirical findings.
- iv. Published studies not in English.

### 2.3. Search Outcome

The initial electronic search yielded 117 references. After an initial screening of titles and abstracts, 25 articles were excluded for failing to meet the pre-specified inclusion criteria. Of the 92 articles examined in the full-text screening phase, 58 were excluded as they did not investigate the relationship between anxiety and adjustment in student populations. A total of 34 articles met the eligibility criteria and were incorporated into the final review.

### 2.4. Study Selection

The selection process of studies was carried out in two steps:

**Step 1:** Title and Abstract Screening: The titles and abstracts of all the studies that were identified were separately reviewed by two reviewers to check for compliance with inclusion criteria. Conflicts were resolved by discussion. Studies that were not meeting the inclusion criteria were excluded at this phase.

**Step 2:** Review of Full Text: The full text papers of the potentially included studies were accessed and assessed under the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

### 2.5. Data Extraction

To facilitate systematic data collection, an extraction template was designed for each included study according to its specifications. The data gathered included names of author, year of publication, aim of the study, theoretical frameworks, study design, sample, instruments, analysis and key findings. Two reviewers performed data extraction separately and any disagreements were resolved through consensus and discussion.

### 2.6. Synthesis

Following the processes of data extraction and quality assessment, thematic analysis was employed to consolidate and interpret the findings across the included literature. Thematic analysis involves structural evaluations as well as summarizing results from each study while examining the trends, patterns and assessing the evidence's strength and reliability of each study. Following the thematic analysis, the six main categories were established:

- i. Anxiety and general adjustment
- ii. Test anxiety in relation to adjustment
- iii. Social anxiety in relation to social adaptation
- iv. Relationship between anxiety and educational adaptation
- v. Emotional challenges associated with anxiety
- vi. Social adjustment difficulties associated with anxiety

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1. Study Characteristics

A detailed overview of the reviewed studies, highlighting their objectives, design, sampling and major findings, is provided in Table 1. Most of the studies employed a descriptive-correlational or survey design with cross-sectional, normative survey, quantitative survey, where descriptive-correlational designs being the most common. Only one study, conducted by Nordstrom et al. (2014), utilized a longitudinal design. Majority of study participant, were secondary school and college students. Most studies used random and purposive sampling techniques, although a few used convenience samplings. Twelve studies had  $N > 400$ , and sample sizes ranged widely, ranging from 60 to 3922 participants.

Anxiety was mostly assessed with the help of the Sinha Anxiety Scale, Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale -7 (Spitzer et al., 2006), Sharma's Test Anxiety Scale and Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (LaGreca, 1999; LaGreca & Lopez, 1998). Adjustment was also done through the Bell Adjustment Inventory, Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire, and

Adjustment Inventory for School Students. However, some studies used researcher-developed tools, limiting cross-study comparability. Despite these insights, there was no uniformity in the terminology and theoretical frameworks used. While

some studies did mention model, like Self-Determination Theory, or Cognitive Behavioural Frameworks, most studied did not indicate their theoretical bases.

| Study (Year)                    | Objectives of the study  | Research design,   | Instrument  | Key Findings  |
|---------------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| Ahuja (2016)                    | To investigate the correlation between secondary school students' academic anxiety and adjustment.   | Sampling Method and Sample (N) Descriptive survey; random sampling technique; 200 Class IX students.                   | Academic Anxiety Scale for Children (Singh & Gupta, 2013) and Adjustment Inventory for School Students (Sinha & Singh, 2013).   | Academic anxiety and adjustment are negatively co-related. Boys have better adjustment than girls. No gender differences in levels of academic anxiety.                 |
| Akhtar (2012)                   | To explore the relationship between anxiety and adaptation among tribal and non-tribal.  | Descriptive-correlational; purposive sampling method; 184 tribal & non-tribal students.                                | Sinha Anxiety Scale and Bell Adjustment Inventory.  | Anxiety negatively correlates with overall adjustment, with stronger association found in emotional adjustment. Tribal students show higher anxiety, poorer adjustment. |
| Alam & Halder (2018)            | To explore the association between test anxiety and adaptation, including educational, emotional, and social adaptation, among secondary school students.  | Normative survey; random sampling method; 200 secondary school students.   | Adjustment Inventory for School Students (Sinha and Singh, 2006) and Sharma's Test Anxiety Scale.                               | Test anxiety negatively correlates with overall adjustment, emotional adjustment, social adjustment and educational adjustment.   |
| Aletan & Akinsola (2014)        | To examine how social anxiety disorder influences the development of social skills and adjustment among adolescents.   | Descriptive survey; stratified random sampling technique; 200 secondary school level two students aged 17 to 21 years. | Index of Social Anxiety and Social Adjustment Questionnaire self-designed by the researchers.                                   | Social anxiety is negatively associated with social adjustment.   |
| Arjanggi & Kusumaningsih (2016) | To examine the social anxiety as a predictor of college students academic adjustment.  | Correlational research design; 439 first-year students of psychology.  | Students Adjustment to College Questionnaire and Social Anxiety Scale.  | Social anxiety negatively correlates with academic adjustment.  |
| Bano & Ahmad (2016)             | To examine whether social anxiety is a significant predictor of adjustment issues in adolescent.   | Descriptive survey; systematic random sampling technique; 500 adolescents aged between 12-19 years.                    | Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents -Urdu Version (Bano & Ahmad, 2014) and Reynolds Adolescent Adjustment Screening Inventory. | Social anxiety plays a substantial role in predicting adjustment-related difficulties.  |
| Behera & Pandey (2025)          | To examine the association between social appearance anxiety and psychological adaptation, and the mediating roles of self-esteem and resilience in their association. Also, to examine the role of demographic factors on psychological adjustment and social appearance anxiety. | Cross-sectional descriptive survey; convenience sampling technique; 215 university students aged 18 to 25 years.       | Appearance Anxiety Inventory (Veale et al., 2014) and Brief Adjustment Scale (Cruz et al., 2019).                               | Social appearance anxiety is negatively correlated with psychological adjustment and self-esteem serves as a mediator in this relationship.                             |
| Bhuvaneswari (2020)             | To investigate the interconnection between test anxiety and educational adaptation.  | Descriptive-correlational; purposive sampling method; 70 arts and engineering students.                                | Test Anxiety Scale and Sinha and Singh's Adjustment Inventory for College Students.   | Test anxiety is weakly and non-significantly negatively correlated with educational adjustment.   |

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| Cao, et al. (2023)         | To examine the interconnection between anxiety and excessive smartphone use in early adolescence, how school adjustment mediates the relationship as well as its moderation through physical activity.                                | Cross-sectional research; convenience sampling method; 445 students enrolled in the first year of junior high school.   | Physical Activity Rating Scale (Liang, 1994); Depression Anxiety Stress – Anxiety subscale (Wang et al., 2016) and School Adjustment Scale (Cui, 2008).    | Physical activity serves as a moderator in the link between anxiety and school adaptation.  |
| Chakrabarty (2019)         | To investigate the link between anxiety and adjustment among. among Undergraduate and Postgraduate students.  | Descriptive-correlational; purposive sampling method; 94 undergraduate and postgraduate students.   | Sinha's Comprehensive Anxiety test and Bell's Adjustment Inventory.  | Anxiety and adjustment are positively correlated in both UG and PG students.  |
| Das, et al. (2022)         | To investigate the connection of anxiety, intolerance of uncertainty, positive affect and negative affect with psychological adaptation and life satisfaction among youths.   | Descriptive-correlational; convenience sampling method; 409 students aged between 14-34 years.  | Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale -7 (Spitzer et al., 2006) and Brief Adjustment Scale– 6 (Kraus et al., 2005).   | Anxiety negatively correlates with psychological adjustment.  |
| Gómez-Ortiz, et al. (2018) | To investigate the prevalence of social anxiety among adolescents in the school environment and its implications for psychosocial adaptation.   | Descriptive-correlational; stratified cluster random sampling method with proportional representation implemented at a single stage; 2.060 secondary school students. | Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (La Greca & Lopez, 1998); Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965); Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003). | Social anxiety is negatively correlated with psychosocial adjustment.   |
| Hassan (2020)              | To examine the interrelationships between cognitive emotion regulation, test anxiety and academic adaptation; and the mediating role of cognitive emotion regulation in the association between test anxiety and academic adaptation. | Quantitative survey; convenient sampling technique; 180 male college students.  | CERQ (Garnefski , Kraaij & Spinnhoven, 2001); CTAS (Jerrell & Ronald, 2002) & SACQ (Baker & Sirk, 1989).   | Academic adjustment negatively correlates with test anxiety.  |
| Hassan (2022)              | To investigate the correlation between electronic test anxiety and psychological adjustment.  | Descriptive-correlational; stratified random sampling method; 281 students.   | Electronic test anxiety scale and Psychological Adjustment Scale.  | Higher electronic test anxiety among females; Electronic test anxiety is inversely related to psychological adjustment.                             |
| Jahan (2020)               | To examine the interrelationships between anxiety, adjustment and academic achievement among school students.   | Descriptive survey; incidental & purposive sampling method; 210 Class VIII students.  | Adjustment test (Srivastava & Tewari) and Anxiety test (Naqvi & Razi).   | Anxiety negatively correlates with adjustment. Females have higher anxiety but better adjustment than males.  |
| Jenaabadi et. al. (2016)   | To investigate the associations between anxiety, adjustment and procrastination among female students.  | Descriptive-correlational; multistage cluster sampling method; 350 female high school students.   | Beck Anxiety Inventory (Beck et al., 1988) and Adjustment Inventory of High School Students (Sinha & Singh, 1993) .  | Anxiety positively correlates with educational, emotional and social adjustment.  |
| Kusumaningsih (2016)       | To investigate the association between social anxiety and adaptation.   | Descriptive-correlational; 436 college students aged ranging from 18 to 19 years.   | Student adjustment to college questionnaire (Carter, Locks, & Winkle-Wagner, 2013) and Social anxiety scale adapted from La Greca.                         | Anxiety about negative judgment is related to academic and personal-emotional adaptation, but is not related to social or institutional adaptation. |



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| Madhunanda (2020)             | To examine the effect of anxiety as a trait of personality on adjustment.  | Descriptive-correlational; incidental cum purposive sampling method; 480 undergraduate students.                          | Anxiety Scale (Sinha, 1980) and Mohsin-Shamshad Adaptation (1987).  | Anxiety negatively correlates with adjustment and social adjustment.   |
| Manikandan & Selvaraju (2017) | To explore the connection between anxiety and behavioural adjustment in higher secondary school students.  | Descriptive survey; simple random sampling technique; 982 higher secondary students.                                      | Anxiety Scale (Manikandan & Selvaraju, 2016) and Adjustment Behaviour Inventory (Manikandan & Selvaraju, 2016).   | Anxiety significantly correlates with adjustment behaviour. Male exhibit lower anxiety levels, while female students show better adjustment.   |
| Nordstrom, et al. (2014)      | To investigate the effect of social anxiety on academic, social, emotional and institutional adaptation of first-semester college students; and how self-esteem mediates this association.   | Longitudinal survey; 271 first-year college students aged 18-19 years.  | Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (LaGreca, 1999; LaGreca & Lopez, 1998) and Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker & Stryk, 1999).                    | Social anxiety is negatively correlated with academic adjustment. Self-esteem serves as the mediator in the social anxiety and academic adjustment relationship.   |
| Oni & Soji-Oni (2022)         | To investigate the connection between social anxiety, peer acceptance and social adaptation among secondary school adolescents.  | Descriptive survey; stratified sampling technique; 350 senior secondary level two students.                               | Questionnaire based on social anxiety, peer acceptance, social adjustment, and emotional support.   | Social anxiety is negatively correlated with social adjustment.  |
| Panchal & Yadav (2020)        | To explore the interrelationship between anxiety, depression and emotional adaptation among adolescents.   | Correlational; purposive sampling method; 100 urban students aged 16 to 18 years.   | Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7), (Spitzer, Williams, Kroenke, et al., 1999) & Adolescent's Emotional Adjustment Inventory (Patil, 1989).                         | Anxiety positively correlates with emotional adjustment. Anxiety is predictive factor of emotional adjustment.   |
| Park, et al. (2022)           | To investigate the interrelationship between anxiety, stress, depression and adjustment among overseas students studying in South Korea during COVID-19 pandemic, and to determine the significant factors affecting their college life adjustment | Descriptive survey; G*Power version 3.1.9.4, following Cohen's guidelines for power analysis; 150 international students. | Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scales (DASS), (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) and Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire by Baker & Stryk (1989), modified by Lee (1999). | Depression, anxiety, and stress are negatively correlated with adjustment to college life.   |
| Perween (2019)                | To investigate the relationship between anxiety and adjustment among college students from Hindu and Muslim backgrounds and to examine the role played by socio-economic status in influencing this connection.                                    | Comparative & correlational; stratified random sampling method; 160 students.   | Anxiety Scale (Sinha, 1975) and Bell Adjustment Inventory (1963).   | Anxiety is positively correlated with adjustment. Socioeconomic status plays a significant role in psychological well-being, with higher socioeconomic status linked to lower anxiety and improved overall adjustment. |
| Purohit (2019)                | To investigate the correlation between academic anxiety and adjustment. Also, to assess the difference between adolescent girls of working & non-working mothers regarding academic anxiety & adjustment.  | Descriptive-correlational; 100 adolescent girls belonging to working & non-working mothers aged 15-18 years.              | Academic Anxiety Scale (Pal, et al., 1985) and Reynolds Adolescence Adjustment Screening Inventory.   | Academic anxiety negatively correlates with adjustment. Children of employed mothers exhibit high levels of academic anxiety while children of non-employed mothers exhibit better adjustment.                         |
| Ranjeeta (2018)               | To investigate the association between anxiety and adaptation among secondary school students.   | Descriptive-correlational; random sampling technique; 160 students.   | Bell Adjustment Inventory, and State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger).   | Anxiety negatively correlates with adjustment. No gender differences in anxiety and adjustment levels between boys and girls.  |

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| Salamanca-Camargo, et al. (2021) | To determine the consistency existing between the dimensions of state-trait anxiety and the general state of adaptation in adolescents.   | Correlational; convenience sampling method; 98 school students aged 12 and 15 years.   | State-trait anxiety Inventory developed by Spielberger (1992), adapted for Colombia by Castrillón and Borrero (2005). and Bell's Adjustment Inventory. | Anxiety negatively correlates with adaptation. Emotional and family adaptations are negatively correlated with anxiety.  |
| SarathChandran (2023)            | To investigate the association between challenges in educational adaptation and anxiety in students shifting from private to government schools.  | Descriptive-correlational; purposive sampling technique; 300 transitional students.  | Educational Adjustment Scale and anxiety scale.  | Educational adjustment positively correlates with anxiety.   |
| Shalayiding et al. (2024)        | To examine the nature of adjustment of adjustment among school students and in relation to anxiety, depression and stress, and to explore gender-based differences in these associations. | Quantitative; multistage stratified cluster sampling method; 3922 secondary school students.                                       | Depression-Anxiety-Stress Scale (Lovibond et al., 1995) and School Adaptation Questionnaire (Cui Na, 2008).  | Anxiety and school adjustment are negatively correlated; gender differences exist in symptom patterns.   |
| Sharma, et. al. (2021)           | To explore the relationship between anxiety, personality traits and adjustment among tribal college-going female students.  | Cross-sectional observational; simple random technique; 160 tribal college girl students.  | Sinha Anxiety Scale and Bell Adjustment Inventory.   | Anxiety negatively correlates with adjustment; extrovert personality positively influences adjustment of tribal girls. Extroverts tend to adjust better than introverts.       |
| Singh & Mahato (2015)            | To examine the interrelationship between emotional intelligence, adjustment and anxiety.  | Correlational; purposive sampling technique; 60 male students living in urban area having both parents                             | Bell Adjustment Inventory and Sinha Anxiety Scale.   | Anxiety negatively correlates with adjustment.   |
| Singh (2013)                     | To investigate the association between anxiety and adaptation among students with varying academic performance.   | Descriptive-correlational; stratified random sampling technique; 100 tribal college students                                       | Sinha Anxiety Scale and Mohsin Shamshed Adaptation of Bell's Adjustment Inventory.   | Anxiety is negatively correlated with adjustment in both high achievers and low achievers. High achievers have higher anxiety but better adjustment compared to low achievers. |
| Stella & Chukwunonyem (2019)     | To investigate the predictive function of school adjustment, locus of control, and achievement motivation in determining test anxiety among secondary school students.                    | Correlation-multiple prediction design; simple random sampling & stratified sampling methods; 388 junior secondary school students | Test Anxiety Questionnaire and Adjustment to School Questionnaire self-developed by the researcher.  | School adjustment and test anxiety are positively correlated; school adjustment is a predictor of test anxiety   |
| Ulya, et al. (2023)              | To explore how self-adjustment influences the levels of anxiety in students.  | Correlational; purposive sampling method; 122 students aged 18-21 years  | Self-adjustment scale and Anxiety scale.   | Anxiety negatively correlates with self-adjustment. Higher anxiety leads to lower self-adjustment, while better self-adjustment reduces anxiety.                               |

**Table 1: Summary of included studies' objectives, designs, samples, measures and findings.**

### 3.2. Anxiety and general adjustment

Studies consistently show that anxiety and overall adjustment are inversely correlated. Higher levels of anxiety are linked to poorer adjustment (Ahuja, 2016; Akhtar, 2012; Cao et al., 2023; Jahan, 2020; Madhunanda, 2020; Park et al., 2022; Ranjeeta, 2018; Salamanca Camargo et al., 2021; Shalayiding et al., 2024; Sharma et al., 2021; Singh & Mahato, 2015; Singh, 2013). Anxiety is negatively related to adjustment behaviours (Manikandan & Selvaraju, 2017). Self-adjustment is inversely related to anxiety; where greater the anxiety, worse the self-adjustment (Ulya et al., 2023). People with high anxiety

characteristics tend to exhibit controlling behaviours, which can cause frustration and ultimately result in poor adjustment (Madhunanda, 2020). Although high achievers are more anxious, they adapt better compared to low achievers (Singh, 2013). However, some studies indicated adjustment and anxiety are positively related (Chakrabarty, 2019; Perween, 2019). Students belonging to high socioeconomic status has lower levels of anxiety and better adjusted as compared to low socioeconomic status (Perween, 2019). School leaving, bullying, and social media usage lead to greater anxiety, while parental support and high self-esteem enhance adjustment

(Salamanca Camargo et al., 2021).

Females have higher levels of anxiety, but show improvement in adjustment. Although the males are less anxious, yet they are poorer in adjustment (Jahan, 2020; Chakrabarty, 2019; Manikandan & Selvaraju, 2017). Males are adjusted better than females as they receive greater social exposure, while limited opportunities could restrict the social competence of females (Ahuja, 2016). Males and females also differ in how they manage their emotions; males “have difficulty relaxing” and females “depression and frustration” (Shalayiding et al., 2024). Tribal students are better adapted emotionally but more anxious and poorer social and health adaptation due to socio-political reasons (Akhtar, 2012). Tribal girls who have extrovert personality have less difficulty adjusting compared to those who have introvert personality which indicates the role of personality in adjustment (Sharma et al., 2021).

The association between anxiety and school adjustment is moderated by physical activity, highlighting its protective influence in educational settings (Cao et al., 2023). Motivation and goal-setting, as well as building resiliency, are believed to facilitate adjustment (Ahuja, 2016). The institution’s mental health services should also address the difficulties international students face in adjusting to their new social and cultural environments (Park et al., 2021). More attention should be given to unrest and emotional problems of particular gender, as well as to a greater degree of individualization (Shalayiding et al., 2024). Positive approach to social participation, social anxiety management, and gender-sensitive attitudes need to be promoted in schools (Shalayiding et al., 2024). Strong self-regulatory capacities serve as a protective factor against anxiety, highlighting their importance as an intervention target through self-directed coping mechanisms (Ulya et al., 2023).

### 3.3. Test anxiety in relation to adjustment

Test anxiety is negatively correlated with students’ adjustment (Alam & Halder, 2018; Purohit, 2019). It has negative correlations with educational adjustment (Alam & Halder, 2018; Bhuvanewari, 2020; Hassan, 2020). Moreover, electronic test anxiety is negatively correlated to all aspects of adjustment – emotional, social, and educational adjustment (Alam & Halder, 2018). The relationship between test anxiety and academic adjustment is mediated by adaptive cognitive emotion regulation, implying that interventions designed to enhance regulatory strategies will be effective in promoting more efficient academic adjustment in high-stress environments (Hassan, 2020). However, test anxiety is positively correlated with school adjustment with adjustment playing a predictive role in students’ experiences of test anxiety (Stella & Chukwunonyenim, 2019). Students experience test anxiety exhibits symptoms such as panic, worry, and nausea, when students are not well adjusted to their school environment, leading to difficulty in relaxing and freely taking tests (Stella & Chukwunonyenim, 2019).

Females exhibit higher electronic test anxiety compared to males (Hassan, 2020). Males have lower responses to electronic test anxiety in comparison to females (Hassan, 2020). Purohit

(2019) highlights those children of employed mothers have higher anxiety, while children of non-employed mothers adjust better, suggesting the role of parents’ employment and home environment in child development. The increase for economically independent working mothers has changed the caregiving patterns, which may pose emotional and behavioural difficulties in children despite external care (Purohit, 2019).

Counselling programs should be developed to address electronic test anxiety, and schools should ensure trained counsellors help students manage anxiety, motivation, and adjustment. Students can adapt to various assessment formats with the use of e-learning and electronic assessments (Hassan, 2020; Stella & Chukwunonyenim, 2019). In order to alleviate anxiety induced by poorly structured assessments, test developers should make sure that tests have strong evaluation criteria and not be regarded indicators of individual value (Stella & Chukwunonyenim, 2019).

### 3.4. Social anxiety in relation to social adaptation

Research has consistently showed that social anxiety negatively affects ability of the individuals to adjust socially, thereby, inhibiting their capacity to interact effectively in social situations (Aletan & Akinsola, 2014; Nordstrom et al., 2014; Oni & Soji Oni, 2022). Social anxiety has a negative impact on academic adjustment (Arjanggi & Kusumaningsih, 2016) and also psychosocial adjustment (Gómez-Ortiz et al., 2018). Social appearance anxiety is associated with poor psychological adjustment, which involves low self-esteem, poor coping skills, and increased anxiety and depression (Behera & Pandey, 2025). Adolescents’ social adjustment is highly affected by an increase in social anxiety, potentially leading to psychological disorders. Social anxiety plays a detrimental role in adjustment issues, which affect mental health and interpersonal relationships. High social anxiety can cause emotional, behavioural and developmental problems by lowering self-esteem, making it harder to reach developmental goals and lowering self-worth (Bano & Ahmad, 2016). Individuals with a moderate level of social anxiety benefit from social interactions (Aletan & Akinsola, 2014). Social appearance anxiety leads to psychological adjustment difficulties among late adolescents, low education level individuals, eldest child, and users of Instagram. Religious individuals exhibit improved psychological adjustment and improved ability to cope with challenges (Behera & Pandey, 2025).

The mediating role of self-esteem in the correlation between adjustment and social anxiety suggests that reduced self-esteem corresponds with greater impairment in adapting to school and social settings (Nordstrom et al., 2014). However, Behera and Pandey (2025) pointed out that self-esteem has a positive mediating function in the connection between social appearance anxiety and psychological adjustment, where individuals with higher self-esteem exhibited more positive psychological results, such as lower levels of social avoidance and anxiety.

Aletan & Akinsola (2014) highlight that adolescent should develop effective coping techniques in order to deal with social anxiety and build self-esteem. Similarly, Behera &

Pandey (2025) recommend that families and peers should focus on the efforts on enhancing adjustment in order to ensure a supportive environment for adolescents. In addition, Arjanggi & Kusumaningsih (2016) recommends schools to implement focused programs helping students adjust to new school environments. Mental health education is required in universities, and there is a need for social appearance anxiety programs to be funded by policymakers (Behera & Pandey, 2025). Schools need to cultivate a positive learning environment while providing guidance and counselling to students and help them to mitigate exposure to antisocial peers (Oni & Soji Oni, 2022). Gender-focused support policy should be developed to effectively address students' needs (Oni & Soji Oni, 2022).

### 3.5. Relationship between anxiety and educational adaptation

Anxiety and educational adaptation are positively correlated, where increased anxiety levels lead to difficulties in adapting to educational settings (Jenaabadi et al., 2016; SarathChandran, 2023). The tranquillity sub-scale tends to have a higher state anxiety, while lower scores of state anxiety being the most frequent in the fear sub-scale (Jenaabadi et al., 2016). Factors such as bullying, cyberbullying, school dropout risk, social media use, and physical activity influence the high scores in fear and tranquillity sub-scale, with physical activity serving as a protective factor (Jenaabadi et al., 2016). State anxiousness can be managed with preventive strategies at the level of family and school, as well as social context (Jenaabadi et al., 2016). Remodelling of curriculum, instructional methods, and setting learning environments increase levels of anxiety thereby hindering students' ability to adapt to new academic demands (SarathChandran, 2023).

### 3.6. Emotional challenges associated with anxiety

Anxiety negatively correlated with psychological adjustment (Das et al., 2022) and emotional adjustment (Salamanca Camargo et al., 2021). Complications in peace of mind, avoidance, and preoccupation are associated with poor emotional adaptation, often influenced by factors such as bullying or obesity. The challenges of puberty, especially concerns about body appearance, make emotional and social adaptation more difficult and increase the risk of substance use in later years (Salamanca Camargo et al., 2021). Moreover, intolerance of uncertainty either in assessing future prospects or in risk avoidance has a negative effect on psychological adjustment. Unfavourable psychological and emotional states give rise to social concerns and behaviours, including fear and worry, which ultimately culminates in low psychological well-being (Das et al., 2022).

However, some research indicated that anxiety is positively correlated with emotional adjustment which signifies that higher the anxiety, poorer the emotional adjustment (Jenaabadi et al., 2016; Panchal & Yadav, 2020). Furthermore, anxiety is an indicator of the issues in emotional adjustment (Panchal & Yadav, 2020).

### 3.7. Social adjustment difficulties associated with anxiety

Anxiety is inversely associated with social adjustment

(Madhunanda, 2020). Controlling behaviour in highly anxious people leads to distress and difficulty in adapting (Madhunanda, 2020). Similarly, anxiety negatively affects social adaptation, especially in areas like avoidance, somatization, preoccupation, and sadness. While moderate anxiety may have little effect on social adaptation, high anxiety levels can cause social difficulties and may lead to disorders like social phobia and social anxiety (Salamanca Camargo et al., 2021). However, Jenaabadi et al. (2016) found that anxiety was positively associated with social adjustment, indicating that high levels of anxiety correspond to greater difficulty in social adaptation.

## 4. DISCUSSION

The results confirm the well-documented negative relationship between anxiety and adjustment, reinforcing those higher levels of anxiety are invariably correlated with poorer adjustment in all domains, such as academic, emotional, social, and psychological adaptation. Individual with higher anxiety tend to exhibit maladaptive behaviours, such as controlling traits, which hinder effective social and personal adaptation (Madhunanda, 2020). Certain factors such as bullying, social media, and risk of school dropouts lead to anxiety, whereas parental guidance, self-adjustment, and interventions based on planning enhance adjustment (Salamanca Camargo et al., 2021; Ahuja, 2016). However, high achievers demonstrate a better adjustment than low achievers, which indicates that motivation and academic achievement may moderate the adverse consequences of anxiety (Singh, 2013).

Interestingly, some studies have indicated a positive correlation between anxiety and adjustment (Chakrabarty, 2019; Perween, 2019), but perhaps these studies indicate the operation of compensatory mechanisms in individuals having high anxiety, where anxiety is redirected towards adaptive functioning in given socio-cultural environments – such as among persons with higher socioeconomic status or in a regulated academic environment. For example, though females are said to experience greater anxiety, they tend to have better adjustment outcomes compared to males, implying gender differences in coping and emotional processing (Jahan, 2020; Chakrabarty, 2019). Likewise, tribal students demonstrate improved emotional adaptation despite increased anxiety, highlighting the confluence of resilience and cultural identity (Akhtar, 2012; Sharma et al., 2021).

Gender variation in anxiety and adjustment suggest that the difference among the genders show anxiety was reported to be higher among females, and yet, it seems they are better adjusted, likely due to better emotional control mechanisms and support systems (Jahan, 2020; Chakrabarty, 2019). However, males exhibit better adjustment in certain contexts as a result of gender-based socialization processes (Ahuja, 2016). The observed pattern of increased anxiety and low social adjustment among introverted tribal students highlights the influence of socio-political and cultural environments on individual adjustment (Akhtar, 2012; Sharma et al., 2021).

In the context of test anxiety, findings highlight that test anxiety greatly impacts educational adjustment, particularly



among students with low school adaptation levels. Test anxious students tend to experience physiological as well as emotional symptoms that hinder performance, reaffirming the necessity of cognitive emotion regulation methods to moderate the effects (Hassan, 2020). The role of gender in test anxiety remains critical, with females showing greater electronic test anxiety as a result of possibly both societal expectations and educational pressures (Purohit, 2019). The influence of family environments, particularly parental employment status, also shapes academic anxiety and subsequently adjustment.

Social anxiety is one of the issues posing serious problems to social and psychological adjustment. Adolescents with higher levels of social anxiety have low self-esteem and emotional distress, as well as problems in achieving goals (Bano & Ahmad, 2016). Also, social anxiety in moderate amounts is deemed to be beneficial by promoting socially adaptive behaviour, however excessive social anxiety leads to social maladjustment (Aletan & Akinsola, 2014). Hence, intervention programs should emphasize enhancement of self-esteem, peer counselling and organized transition programs to promote social participation (Behera & Pandey, 2025; Arjanggi & Kusumaningsih, 2016).

Educational and emotional adjustment difficulties are consistently associated with increased anxiety particularly during major transitions (e.g., shifting from private to government schools) (SarathChandran, 2023). Factors like cyberbullying, chances of school dropout, and rate of physical activity affect educational adaptation, with physical activity acting as a protective factor (Jenaabadi et al., 2016). The difficulties associated with emotional adjustment are worsened by uncertainty, fear, and other negative emotions which further strengthen the need for early intervention (Das et al., 2022; Salamanca Camargo et al., 2021).

### Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although this study covers a wide scope, it has some limitations. First, using cross-sectional studies makes it difficult to examine how anxiety causes changes in adjustment. Future longitudinal studies could help better understand how anxiety affects adjustment over time. Secondly, cultural and contextual diversity within the reviewed studies might influence the extent of generalizability of findings. As a result of varying education systems, social norms and coping styles, the correlation between anxiety and adjustment can be diverse across populations. Additionally, the existence of discrepancies such as the occasional positive relationship between adjustment and anxiety (Chakrabarty, 2019) emphasizes the need to study the intervening variables deeper. Ultimately, there is greater need to analyse the sociocultural, biological, and psychological determinants regarding the differences in the relationship of anxiety and adjustment.

### CONCLUSION

This study outlines the strikingly adverse relationship that exists between anxiety and adjustment with respect to academics, social life as well as emotional and psychological issues. While anxiety impedes adjustment, its effects can be mitigated through resilience, self-esteem, social support, and

proper guidance. The analysis emphasized that there is a great need for gender sensitive and culturally responsive intervention to help with the specific challenges caused by anxiety. Cognitive-behavioural therapy, school mental health programs and organizational assistance systems must be developed to promote effective coping strategies and improved adjustment of students generally. Anxiety must be addressed through intervention methods in an attempt to promote student well-being and academic achievement. Long-term trends, cultural differences and individual differences must be the areas of future research in an attempt to further clarify the anxiety-adjustment relationship.

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